Trouble

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TO

THE MEMORY

Of One Who for a Generation Walked by My Side
And Whose Fine Fortitude
Taught Me Many Noble Lessons
In Our Joint Tutelage in the School of Sorrow
This Little Volume
Is Tenderly Inscribed

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I

THE NATURE OF TROUBLE

I also will make him my firstborn,
The highest of the kings of the earth.
My lovingkindness will I keep for him for evermore;
And my covenant shall stand fast with him.
His seed also will I make to endure for ever,
And his throne as the days of heaven.
If his children forsake my law,
And walk not in mine ordinances;
If they break my statutes,
And keep not my commandments;
Then will I visit their transgression with the rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
But my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him,
Nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.
My covenant will I not break,
Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

—Psalm 89: 27-34.

THE NATURE OF TROUBLE

Every thoughtful person has sought a solution of the problem of human suffering. Everybody is wondering at the fact that people have trouble, and particularly at the fact that good people have trouble. There is a still greater mystery in the fact that good people (those who in Christian parlance are called God's children) seem to have more trouble than those whom we Christians call the people of the world.

Before going further let us examine that idea that Christians have more trouble than crass worldlians. In the first place it may not be really true. There is no possible way of getting statistics or applying the law of averages in such a case, and the Scriptures commonly relied on for proof are not quite convincing. An old-time preacher friend of mine, quite certain of its truth, used to say: "That is plain enough to me. I whip my own children, I do not whip the children of my neighbors. God is the same way. He has made a solemn covenant to whip his own children when they go wrong. In the Eighty-ninth Psalm God says: 'If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. My

covenant will I not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth.' In this Scripture we see God's solemn covenant to whip his own children when they go wrong. He has no such covenant out concerning those who are not his children. He definitely chastises his own children according to promise. As for the others, he lets them take 'pot luck' with the law of cause and effect."

I certainly do not offer this naive exegesis of the pioneer preacher as a complete and satisfactory explanation of the apparent phenomenon, but at the risk of being counted a crude traditionalist I do not hesitate to say that in my opinion there is much truth in the old man's quaint exegesis and illustration.

I do not hope in these brief lines to give an entirely satisfactory solution of this problem. No man ever has done that and, I take it, no man ever will. The most I can hope for is that out of long experience, a rather wide observation, and a fairly close study of the teaching of God's Word on the subject, I may be able to say a word that will help some who are suffering to bear such suffering bravely and even to rejoice in it.

Confessing our limitations, let us face the question squarely. What is the source of human suffering? Or to put it a little more colloquially: Who sends trouble?

We need not be surprised that we find the question hard to answer. In the beginning God said to Eve, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow." From that day to this day every human life has had its sorrow and every human mind has, more or less intelligently, sought a solution of the problem it brings. Ever since Eve wept over the dead body of Abel, women, the good and the bad alike—have been bewildered when their children die. Ever since Hagar without food or shelter wandered through the wilderness with her outcast boy, people have been wondering at the inequalities of life in the matter of poverty and wealth. Ever since Job, because of a loathsome leprosy, was cast out of his own house and lay in an ash bank scratching his sores with a piece of broken pottery, men have been wondering at the coming of sickness for which there could be found no visible physical cause. From the mysterious disappearance of Joseph to the day when the tragic official report came that a certain World War soldier was "missing," devoted fathers have been wondering why God permitted them to bear the cruelty of uncertainty rather than have definite assurance of death. Ever since David's heart broke with the tidings of Absalom's death, devout fathers have been dazed with the conduct of wicked and ungrateful sons. Ever since Parson Judas succeeded in getting himself elected to a high office

in the first church, sane, conservative, refined, honest people have wondered why they should suffer the mortification of seeing the trickster, the mountebank, the hypocrite cutting a wide swath in the pulpit and in church councils while worthy men whose sacrificial labors make the institutions of religion possible plod in obscurity. Ever since Jesus went to the cross good men have been amazed that God does not arbitrarily put out his hand and save his people from the anguish of seeing wrong triumph over right. Why was Homer a pauper? Why was Milton blind? Why did Sidney Lanier die a consumptive at thirty-nine? Why must the brilliant Frederick W. Robertson die with a crushed spirit at thirty-seven? Why was Charles Spurgeon cut off from his place of world-wide usefulness when barely past middle life? Why should George McDaniel die at fifty-two? But why go on? Every page of history in every age and in every clime furnishes us with evidence of the mystery about which we are to think in these pages—the mystery of lives crippled, handicapped, thwarted, crushed.

Among the ancient Jews there seems to have been the practically universal opinion that suffering and misfortune were the direct judgments of God because of sin. To them adversity was proof of God's displeasure, while prosperity was an evidence of his approval. That this was the

orthodox view among ancient Jews is clearly set out in that marvelous Jewish drama we call the book of Job. My observation leads me to the conclusion that this same view is held among them more or less tenaciously to this day. The truth is that many people who are not Jews hold to that doctrine even here in the heart of the twentieth century. And is there not a sense in which they are correct? I know I am going out into the field of speculation, but as a matter of fact does not my reader believe that if there had been no sin there would have been no sorrow, no suffering? The mistake of the orthodox Jew is that he makes this result always direct and immediate, not recognizing that it is sometimes indirect and remote. I think we may as well admit that all human suffering is the result of sin, sometimes direct and immediate, sometimes indirect and remote. But it is puerile to try to explain every specific sorrow as the result of some specific sin of the sufferer or of some specified sin of his ancestors.

There are some who in order to relieve God of responsibility say that God does not *send* suffering into out lives; that he only *permits* it. The man who says that, thinking he relieves God of responsibility, is thinking superficially. God is as truly responsible for permitting sorrow that he could prevent as if he had sent it directly. A man assaults a child. I am sitting by and

could have prevented it. I lift no hand to do so. The courts hold me responsible for the crime and will punish me along with the actual assailant. Here are your alternatives. Either God sends suffering into human lives, or he permits it when he could prevent it. It does not matter which position you assume, you fail in your effort to relieve God of responsibility for human suffering. Strange that any one should think he is honoring God by taking from him all responsibility for the ordering of the world he has created. This is God's world. We dishonor rather than honor him when we deny that he is responsible for everything that has happened or that ever will happen in it. If this doctrine leads us into deep water, the opposite doctrine leads us into water still deeper. To go from this to that is "jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire." Any thinking man knows that to deny, for example, God's responsibility for sin being in the world creates a problem more difficult than to admit it. Here is the antithesis: If God could have kept sin with all its subsequent sorrows out of the world and did not, then he has a share of responsibility for its being here. If he wanted to keep it out and could not, then the devil is bigger than God. I am not closing my eyes to the inexplicable difficulties of the first thesis, but am asking those who advocate the second thesis to open their

eyes to the still more inexplicable difficulties implied in that view. God is the potent ruler of his world. Nothing is in his world without his permission. God is responsible for his world. Since the good God is master of this world, we may devoutly believe, and can with confidence affirm, that in the long run he will see to it that good shall triumph over evil.

But embarrassed by this dilemma the superficial thinker leaps to the other extreme and denies that God has anything to do with our troubles, foolishly maintaining that every man is the architect of his own fortune, the master of his own fate. These well-meaning opportunists cite such proverbs as "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and by this method think they have put upon me all responsibility for all my troubles. No one, even apart from its Scriptural authority, denies the truth of that proverb. We see its truth illustrated every day in human life. But there is another Scripture proverb just as true and just as thoroughly demonstrated in human experience, which says, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Even the Decalogue itself teaches me that I may expect trouble for sins committed by my fathers three and four generations back. These ideas are not contradictory. They are not even paradoxical. They not only do not conflict but,

fairly interpreted, they do not even appear to conflict. We reap what we sow. But we also reap a good deal that we did not sow. Both in his ancestors and his offspring man suffers the results of conduct for which he is in no sense responsible. If, on the one hand, the candid man frankly admits that many of his sorrows are the direct results of his own folly and sin, must not the man on the other side, if equally candid, frankly admit that he has many sorrows which are not, so far as he can see, even remotely connected with anything he has done. When a man says, "I am to blame for much of my trouble, but I am not to blame for it all," he speaks the elemental language of every earnest, honest, thoughtful soul.

But if you try to go a step farther back and say there is no personal responsibility—human suffering is the result of law—a law of nature, I will ask you, Who made nature? Who fixed nature's laws? If human suffering is the result of inexorable natural law, why hold men responsible for the suffering they bring upon themselves and upon others?

But to show that there is no connection between sin and suffering, some one cites the ninth chapter of John. In this Scripture the disciples said to Jesus, "Who hath sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And Jesus said, "Neither hath this man sinned nor

his parents." Now notice two things. In the first place Jesus does not say that this blindness was not due to sin somewhere, but simply that it was not due to sin of the blind man or his parents. In the second place, even granting that in this case he meant to teach that this affliction was not even remotely traceable to sin, it by no means proves that he would say that about every case of suffering. He was combatting the orthodox Jewish tenet that all suffering was directly and immediately due to sin, but who will say that in thus speaking he meant to teach that no suffering is directly due to sin? Such a position would not be consistent with his teaching elsewhere. For example in the Sermon on the Mount he says, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again"—a specific declaration of cause and effect. I make a bad measurement, I get a bad measure as a result. If God never sends suffering as the direct result of sin what is meant by the Eighty-ninth Psalm quoted a while ago by my old preacher friend: "If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments: then will I visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes." The same truth is in God's Word concerning Solomon (2 Sam. 7:14): "I will be his father, and he shall be my son, if he commit iniquity I will chasten him with

the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men."

When the four brought their paralytic friend to Jesus he did not merely heal his disease, but said, "Son, be of good courage, thy sins be forgiven thee," unequivocally connecting his disease with the sins of his past life. May we not here also find explanation of this apparent endorsement of the idea current in His day that insanity and demoniacal possession were identical? It would be well if in our day we could learn from the doctors the cause-and-effect relation between sin and erratic disordered minds. If man does not suffer because of sin, and—to go a little farther—if God does not send suffering into men's lives because of their sins, these Scriptures, and many more like them, are utterly untrue. If men do not suffer because of sin, then nothing can be established by human experience, and nothing can be proved by human testimony, and no spiritual truth can be taught by the Word of God.

A woman wails over her dead baby, "What sin have I committed that God should punish me by taking my baby from me?" The preacher is right if in trying to comfort her he says that it is not necessarily always true that God takes our loved ones to punish us for our sins or even to express his displeasure, but he goes too far if he says that such a thing is never true. It

is fine for the pastor to use every legitimate means to soothe the grief-stricken mother, but in the super-tenderness of his heart let him be careful that he does not go beyond the record and make himself wise above what is written. How does the good pastor know that God did not take this baby as an expression of displeasure at sin just as he did the baby of David and Bathsheba?

In the light of observation, in the light of experience and in the light of Scripture teaching, I do not hesitate to maintain that sometimes our sorrows come upon us because of our sins. It seems to me that whether from the standpoint of mere human reason or of divine revelation there is but one sane view, and that is, that God for just and benevolent reasons sends, or—if you prefer it—permits, sorrow in the lives of his people. Else what means the Scripture that says: "And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die. Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick; and it came to pass the seventh day that the child died"? And what means the twelfth of Hebrews where it is declared, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth

every son whom he receiveth "? And what means Paul when in 2 Corinthians 12:7 he clearly implies either that God sent or that God permitted Satan to send his "thorn in the flesh"; or what mean scores of similar passages that cannot possibly be explained on any other hypothesis?

Again let me say that I do not presume to undertake a complete or even an approximate solution of this baffling problem, but if any will follow me prayerfully through the next chapter I hope suggestions I make may be helpful to them. Coined out of my own heart's experiences they have helped me. My prayer is that they may likewise help my reader.

II

WHY WE HAVE TROUBLE

Jehovah is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness.
He will not always chide;
Neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor rewarded us after our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far hath he removed our transgressions from us.
Like as a father pitieth his children,
So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him.
For he knoweth our frame;
He remembereth that we are dust.

—*Psalm 103:8-15.*

WHY WE HAVE TROUBLE

In the previous chapter we have given some time to considering the nature of this problem of human suffering. We are still wondering why a loving Father does not arbitrarily protect his obedient children from every form of trouble. Let us now consider in detail some things that may help us. This chapter will fail as a complete and altogether satisfactory explanation of the philosophy of human suffering. (I have long since learned that no man has found such explanation.) But I candidly believe it contains truth that will help my reader to be joyfully reconciled to trouble even though he may not be able to trace its causes and explain its laws.

In the first place then, God sends or permits suffering in the lives of his people

TO EXPRESS HIS DISPLEASURE AT SIN

If God allowed his people to go on sinning without chastisement it would leave the impression that God thought it all right to sin. God wishes to wash his hands and clear his skirts of the sins of his people. There is no better way to do it than by chastising them when they do wrong. Take a rather crude illustration. Years ago my wife discovered a Negro boy stealing

some jewelry from the dresser of a young lady who roomed in our house. She held the boy till she could send for his grandfather who was working across the street. When the old Negro came he took the boy to the backyard and gave him an almost unmerciful whipping. When he had finished he said: "Do you know what I'se whippin' you for? I'se whippin' you so dese white folks will know dat I don't stand for your stealin'." If the honest old Negro felt the chivalrous impulse to vindicate himself, why should not God, far more scrupulous in the matter of honor, feel the same way? I do not hesitate to maintain that sometimes our sorrows come upon us that God may thereby express his personal displeasure because of our sins and his definite disapproval of them and his disapproval of us for having committed these sins, and his desire to wash his hands of approval of them or of complicity in or responsibility for these sins. Such a view of God does not at all shock my faith nor detract from my conception of him as a loving, benevolent Father.

But to mention a second element in explanation of why God's people suffer, let us say that sometimes suffering comes

TO WEAN US AWAY FROM OUR SINS

In Job 34:31 we read: "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I

will not offend any more. That which I see not teach thou me; if I have done iniquity I will do no more." And the same thought in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." The same idea is illustrated also in the case of Jacob, of David, of Peter, and scores of men in Bible history. There was in every case a definite experience of soul-travail or physical suffering, and after that an equally definite turning away from evil habits. He has had a limited observation of human life who has not seen affliction wean men away from sin. How often have we known men to thank God for affliction because it had just that effect. Since affliction so often results directly and immediately in the sufferer giving up some besetting sin, why is it unreasonable to suppose that a loving Father-God sent the affliction with that very end in view?

When I was a boy my uncle gave me a pony. He was a most desirable nag, except for one bad habit—he would not stand hitched. Leave him untied, and he would stand all day in his tracks; but tie him, and he would break loose at any cost. I determined to break him of his bad habit, so I bought a new rope an inch in diameter and tied him to a live oak tree. In a few minutes his evil habit got the better of him, and he swung back, but he could not break the rope, and he could not uproot the tree. Nothing

daunted, he kept on pulling till he began to choke and at last fell on his side quivering in every muscle—choked down, and, it seemed to me, choked to death. But when the rope was untied he staggered to his feet. After that a twine string was strong enough to hold him. Even if my pony represents nobody else, he certainly represents his master. The Lord had to choke me down before he could cure me of certain bad habits. I wonder if my reader does not see this same thing in his own experience? Most of us were in the beginning so wilful and stubborn that we could not yield ourselves to the Lord till he choked us down by one sort of affliction or another. And now that we have been brought to surrender to his holy will, we can sincerely thank him for the sorrow that drove us to it.

Let me give you another illustration—almost crass—but to me quite graphic. Another uncle of mine had a favorite dog which formed the bad habit of "sucking eggs." He did not want to kill the dog, and he did not want to give him away, but he could not afford the luxury of a dog with a habit like that. He must find some way to cure him of his fault. So he took an egg, "pipped" one end of it, sprinkled in a lot of powdered red pepper, closed up the opening, and left the egg where the dog would find it. He found it and ate it—but he never ate an-

other. By the time he got through with the suffering the red pepper caused he had utterly lost his taste for eggs. The pepper was not administered in the interest of the dog but in the interest of my uncle's family whose rights the dog would not respect. So it may be with our afflictions. Often they are not administered primarily for our good, but for the good of others whose rights are infringed upon, or whose character is injured, or whose usefulness is impaired by our course. In order to take care of others a loving Father must often cause us to suffer that he may cure us of habits hurtful to them.

But we may take another step and say that trouble comes not only to cure evil habits existing but

TO PREVENT EVIL HABITS IN THE FUTURE

Of course none of us can know what a given man might have been under a different set of circumstances, but it is not wild speculation to say concerning certain men we have known that sickness or bereavement or reverse of fortune or some other disappointment was the only thing that could have saved them from making shipwreck of life. They were headed direct for the toboggan-slide to ruin till God threw this sorrow across their paths. Some years ago when I had finished an address on this subject a man

came limping up to the platform. He said: "I know from personal experience the truth of what you are saying. I was reared in a godly home and was converted when a boy. While yet in my teens I got a position as clerk in a commissary on a great plantation in the Mississippi Valley. There were no religious influences. The boys would come over Sunday to the store, and we would play cards in the back room where I slept. I was headed for the devil if any youth ever was. One Sunday morning two of the young fellows got into a scuffle and knocked my pistol from the bed to the floor. It was discharged, and the bullet went into my leg. Before proper medical attention could be had it became so infected that there was nothing to do but amputate the leg just below the hip. Now I have been dragging this piece of wood around for thirty years, but there is hardly a day I don't thank God for it. It is far better to be the man I am with one leg than the man I would have been with two."

The experience of this good man—one of the ripest Christians I ever knew—could be duplicated by the score both from the Bible and from more modern human experience. It is one of a multitude of illustrations showing how in his sure providence God sends grievous affliction to turn our feet away from paths that would lead to disaster more to be dreaded than the

present affliction which now seems so hard to bear.

But a fourth thing to be said in solving the problem of suffering is that God allows us to suffer

THAT HE MAY THEREBY DEVELOP CHARACTER

I have seen a Christian grow in one night of intense anguish more than in a whole lifetime of ease and comfort. I am thinking now of a Christian woman whom I had known intimately for years. No doubt all these years she was a child of God, but if so she was a child indeed—superficial, worldly, pleasure-loving. A little past middle life rheumatism began its work in her body. Soon her lower limbs were so drawn that she could not walk, and her hands so distorted that she could not feed herself. But as the body weakened the spirit grew. In the ten years that she lived in a wheel-chair she grew to be one of the ripest Christians I ever knew. Her faith in God, her fellowship with God, her joy in God challenged the admiration of all who knew her. There is no room to doubt that this woman's growth in the things of the Spirit was the immediate result of the affliction of her body. To complain at a thing like that would be like a little girl weeping because her mother, in the pride of a loving mother's heart,

required her to remove a calico dress that she might put on one made of silk.

If we want a Scripture example, turn to Jacob. He grew more in one night of physical struggle, mental anguish, and a broken thigh than he had in the previous twenty years. In one such night he grew from Jacob the supplanter to Israel, the prince who had power with God. To his death he had a shrunken sinew in his thigh, and went limping for all the rest of his life, but as a result of it he had the golden heart of a prince in his breast. Who would complain at an exchange like that?

Up in the quaint village of Hadley, Massachusetts, lives blind Clarence Hawkes, the famous naturalist, poet, lecturer, and author. In a recent magazine article he said, "God took away my eyes that my soul might see." How fine that out of the alembic of love and suffering one can be brought to an experience like that. List used to say, "The dear cross has pressed many songs out of me." As a further illustration of this point read the following experience told by that ripe saint, James H. McConkey:

Back to me comes the recollection of years of suffering in my own life. I was called home from college by the death of my father. There fell upon me the care of a paralyzed mother, seven children, and thousands of dollars of debt. It was the place of loving duty, and I unhesitatingly stepped into it. But what years of suffering they were! I was only a boy, and the burden was great.

Year after year passed by, and how dark they were as I look back over them now. At last the awful debts were paid; my brother was a successful young business man; my sisters were happily married; and my beloved mother was "absent from the body and present with the Lord." I myself was physically crushed. The path of suffering had been a thorny one, and the way seemed hard and long. Now that the years have fled, and "I trace the rainbow through the rain," those years of suffering have proved to be the holiest ground upon which my feet have ever trodden. For in them, and because of them, I passed out from the will of the flesh concerning my own life into the precious peace of the will of God. I learned obedience through the things which I had suffered. All that I passed through I needed, nor would I recall one day of it now, as I think of the unspeakable blessing it has brought to my life.

We get a little further light on our question if we consider that suffering sometimes comes

TO INCREASE THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE SUFFERER

In John 15:2 we find, "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth so that it may bear more fruit." This passage refers to the pruning of the vine so familiar to us all. Some years ago I rented a cottage connected with which was a vineyard. One day a man came to "purge" (prune) the vines. When he had finished I was sure he had ruined the vineyard. He cut off and threw away what seemed to me the best part of the vines. If those vines had been blessed with intelligence and tongues I am sure they would

have complained that they must lose these beautiful branches, the growing of which had cost so much pain and effort. But the vine-dresser knew that pruning was a condition precedent to fruit bearing. Better sacrifice a few attractive branches now than lose the grapes later on. If the vines knew as much as the vine-dresser they would rejoice at this temporary loss in order to permanent gain. If we knew as much as God knows about the law of spiritual fruitfulness we should rejoice where now we complain because of afflictions that guarantee fruitfulness.

But another thought that may throw some light upon this subject is that by permitting us to suffer God means to qualify us

TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS IN SORROW

Was it Madame de Stael who said, "Sympathy is your pain in my heart"? The only way I can have your pain in my heart is that I shall have experienced in my own heart a pain like yours. I have heard somewhere a song about the bird with a broken pinion. I think the song says that the bird with a broken pinion will never soar so high again. But if I remember correctly it goes on to say that having had a broken pinion it will henceforth fly low where it will be able to help other birds with broken wings. Some of us are by nature much inclined to be high flyers.

High-flying birds are usually not good for anything else. I hear a good deal of flamboyant talk about the eagle that builds its nest in the mountain crag and bathes its plumage in the sun. But after all, what is such a bird worth to society? There is an old Plymouth Rock hen who cannot fly over the barnyard fence, but who will lay twenty eggs a month, and raise a family of respectable chickens every year. You may take your choice, but I prefer one hen like that to a whole cage full of eagles. They fly so high that even if they lay an occasional egg nobody can find it. Some of us are so self-centered and high-soaring that God had to bring us low with sorrow before we could have time or heart for the sorrows of other people.

Bishop Slattery tells a story of Phillips Brooks that one day there came to him a boy who stuttered piteously. The small boy explained that he had heard that Phillips Brooks had stuttered when he was a boy, so he had come to the great man to learn how he had conquered his affliction. "Alas!" said Phillips Brooks, "I never stuttered, so I cannot help you." Then the good bishop goes on to say:

As he looked down into the face of the child, and he saw the last traces of hope fade away, he wished that he had stuttered; for his whole heart went out to the boy, and he longed, with all that loving heart, to lift him out of his distress. I believe that the desire to help humanity may become so intense, that, when a man has lived a life

without thick clouds or raging storms, and when that man faces a human need in its direst form, he will wish that he had known the worst, that now, out of full comprehension he might ease the overwhelming burden which rests upon his neighbor's soul. . . Deep never calls to the shallows of life, but deep calls to deep.

Some years ago a minister in middle life was assisting a younger brother in revival meetings. During the time a baby in the community died. Since the parents were special friends and former parishioners of the visiting preacher, they asked him to conduct the funeral. The young pastor had a wife and two lovely children. He had never known a bereavement. The older man had but recently lost a child. As they walked away from the service that day the fine young pastor said to his older brother: "You have the advantage of me. You know from experience what it means to lose a child. But I do not. Because you understand their feelings you can help the bereaved by speaking from your heart, whereas all of my comfort would come only from the lips. I could almost wish I had your experience that I might be made a better pastor to my people." Dear boy! Within two years he had his experience. One of his babies went home to God. Whatever else he got or failed to get out of his sorrow, it is certain that from that day on he was a better surgeon to souls stricken with bereavement. A broken heart is a great price to pay for deepened sympathy and increased useful-

ness. But is it too great? My dear old friend Dr. J. B. Gambrell used to say, "God can take the fragments of a broken heart and make of them a better heart than we had before."

In a little tract, *The God-Planned Life,* I read this story:

In a certain old town was a great cathedral. And in that cathedral was a wondrous stained-glass window. Its fame had gone abroad over the land. From miles around people pilgrimaged to gaze upon the splendor of this masterpiece of art. One day there came a great storm. The violence of the tempest forced in the window and it crashed to the marble floor, shattered into a hundred pieces. Great was the grief of the people at the catastrophe which had suddenly bereft the town of its proudest work of art. They gathered up the fragments, huddled them in a box, and carried them to the cellar of the church. One day there came along a stranger and craved permission to see the beautiful window. They told him of its fate. He asked what they had done with the fragments. And they took him to the vault and showed him the broken morsels of glass. "Would you mind giving these to me?" said the stranger. "Take them along," was the reply, "they are no longer of any use to us." And the visitor carefully lifted the box and carried it away in his arms. Weeks passed by; then one day there came an invitation to the custodians of the cathedral. It was from a famous artist, noted for his master skill in glass-craft. It summoned them to his study to inspect a stained-glass window, the work of his genius. Ushering them into his studio he stood them before a great veil of canvas. At the touch of his hand upon a cord the canvas dropped. And there before their astonished gaze shone a stained-glass window surpassing in beauty all their eyes had ever beheld. As they gazed entranced upon its rich tints, wondrous pattern, and cunning workmanship, the artist turned

and said, "This window I have wrought from the fragments of your shattered one, and it is now ready to be replaced." Once more a great window shed its beauteous light into the dim aisles of the old cathedral. But the splendor of the new far surpassed the glory of the old, and the fame of its strange fashioning filled the land.

But may we not also maintain that suffering is one avenue through which

GOD MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO HIS CHILDREN

It was when the disciples were in great distress because of a storm at sea that Jesus came to them walking on the water. The very waves that gave them such alarm and caused them such suffering became the highway upon which Jesus walked into their lives. After his distressing night of darkness and physical affliction it is said, "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face." Who would not be willing to pass through a storm at sea if at the end of it he might see Jesus coming to him on the danger-laden waves? Who would not be willing to come limping and crippled, Jacob-like, through a dark night of distress if he knew that it meant he would see God's face in the morning? The glare of the garish day and the blare of a busy life and the ostentatious éclat of worldly success rob us of the sense of God's presence. But the stillness of the death-chamber or the silence of disappointment and

defeat makes an atmosphere in which it is easy to see God's face and hear God's voice. It was "in the valley of the shadow of death" that David was able to say, "Thou art with me."

The last thing I shall maintain in partial explanation of human suffering is that it gives us an opportunity

TO GLORIFY GOD IN THE WAY WE BEAR OUR TROUBLES

In healing the man born blind and in raising Lazarus from the dead our Lord tells us that God was glorifying himself by manifesting his power over disease and death. But the point I am now discussing is not God's glorifying himself but his graciously giving me a chance to glorify him. It is possible for us to assume such a querulous attitude to afflictions as to bring reproach upon Christ. Years ago I was passing through an unusually bitter experience. A young woman, herself not a very ripe Christian, hearing me complaining and wishing that I might die, said to me timidly, "Doctor Ray, does not your religion help you any?" What a rebuke! What a tragedy that a preacher of mature years should throw away such an opportunity to honor Christ by bravely bearing an affliction!

Some years ago a friend in middle life told me a story illustrating my point. With a business man's transparent frankness he said:

Until about three years ago I had not an atom of interest in religion. So far as I know I had never had a religious impulse. I had about decided that the religious instinct had been left out of my nature. But my old father got sick out here in the country and sent to different parts of the State for all of us boys to come home. When all of us were together my father said: "Boys, the doctor tells me I can live only a few days. I do not want any of you to leave until I am dead. I have not sent for you to nurse me or do anything for me. I want you around me these last days simply that you may see how Christ is able to help me meet sickness and death."

My friend went on to say:

He lived ten days. I watched him with the keenest interest. I saw him endure the most intense physical suffering with a smile and face death without a quiver. I saw him do what I had supposed was impossible both mentally and physically—go down into death with a song on his lips.

And he said: "From that day to this I have known that my old father had something I did not get, something I ought to have and something I want. These three years I have been looking for somebody to tell me how to get it." It was an easy matter to lead him to Christ. What a fine thing that the old man made up his mind to glorify Christ before his sons and his neighbors by bearing affliction as a Christian ought! What a shame that you and I forfeit so many golden opportunities to do that same thing!

In the twelfth of Hebrews, that matchless

chapter on chastisement, we are cautioned not to forget that the people about us are taking note of the way we endure affliction. "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses [onlookers], let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." The way he bears affliction is not only one of the safest tests of the genuineness of a man's religion, but it is one of his most effective opportunities of glorifying Christ. My friend, I covet that grace. Don't you?

III

THE NEEDLESS INCREASE OF TROUBLE

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside still waters,
He restoreth my soul:
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever.

—Psalm 23: 1-6.

THE NEEDLESS INCREASE OF TROUBLE

Most of our troubles are fictitious. Our sighs and groans and tears and gloomy hours arise, in large part, from imaginary happenings, absurd unrealities, grotesque phantasmagoria. That statement is not limited in its application to semi-insane hypochondriacs and extreme pessimists and abnormal neurotics and bloodless anemics. It is literally true of the brightest, cheeriest, most optimistic among us. Our lives are shortened, our usefulness crippled, our beauty marred, our happiness destroyed by worry over things that have no foundation in fact but are pure figments of the brain.

In the hope that it will help us rid ourselves of the blight of some of these spectral illusions, let us consider a few of them. In the first place, there is the habit of

ANTICIPATING CALAMITIES THAT NEVER OCCUR

If any reader of these lines will retrace his past life, step by step, he will discover that most of the things that have given him dread and fear have never came to pass. If we could go back over the past and use in some profitable way all the time and thought and nerve force we wasted,

and worse than wasted, trying to avert or gloomily brooding over things that could not happen, it would swell the tide of our good deeds immeasurably.

A woman spent ten years in daily dread of the future because a man, angry with her husband, threatened to return some day and put a "hoodoo" on her son. Of course he did not carry out his threat, of course he could not carry it out, of course there was no such thing as a "hoodoo," but the poor mother for ten years had no joy night or day for fear of it.

A friend of mine told me about a young girl who was sent to the spring for a bucket of water. When she returned she was crying. After much persuasion she told her mother the occasion of her sorrow, saying: "When I was down at the spring I got to thinking: suppose I was grown, and suppose I was married, and suppose I had a little girl, and suppose I sent her to the spring, and suppose she fell into the spring and was drowned. And the thought of it just broke my heart and I could not keep from crying." I take it that this story is not literally true. But there are multitudes of people trembling and unhappy with forebodings for the future quite as groundless and almost as ridiculous.

Dr. Rufus C. Burleson used to tell me that in his first pastorate he would begin about Thursday to worry over the prospects of having his

Sunday service interfered with by rain. He said he was cured of the foolish habit by observing that about nine Sundays out of ten it did not rain, and that on the tenth Sunday when it did rain his worrying had no effect one way or the other. Some future events are in a more or less limited way, in our hands, and there is some justification for being anxious about these. But in the main, the future is not in our hands, and to worry over what it may hold for us is the height of folly. In all the mysterious tides and unknown cycles of the future let us reenforce ourselves with the Word of God in Isaiah 30:15: "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

But a second enervating habit is

MAKING IMAGINARY TROUBLES REAL

A certain boy had to pass every day on his way to school a house where lived a crazy man. Usually he did not even see him when he passed the house but he was always "scared within an inch of his life." Sometimes he would see him standing at the window or on the porch. Then his blood would almost freeze. One fatal morning the man was at the gate. The boy started to run. The man tore out after him. Over the fence the boy went, into the field. Across the cotton patch, down the corn rows, the crazy man hard upon his heels and gaining on him every second. At last the boy, seeing he could not

escape, turned, and threw up his hands to plead for mercy. Instead of beating him, as the boy expected, the crazy man touched him lightly on the shoulder, and scampered away laughing and crossing his fingers, saying, "I got your tag! I got your tag!" How different from what he had imagined!

Jacob furnishes a very good illustration of this foolish but very prevalent habit of exaggerating our troubles. He had sent his sons to Egypt to bring corn back to drought-stricken Canaan. There they met their brother Joseph occupying the highest office in the land save that of the king. Recognizing them, Joseph required them to leave their brother Simeon as a hostage and return to their home and bring Benjamin the youngest son. On arriving home, the plan was laid before Jacob but instead of accepting it he cried out querulously: "Me have ye bereaved of my children! Joseph is not, Simeon is not; and now ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me." The truth was that nothing was against him except his imagination. Joseph and Simeon were in good health, in perfect safety and enjoying every luxury, and nobody had taken Benjamin away. All three of his troubles were imaginary, and yet he suffered from them as poignantly as if they had been real. There are many wrinkles in the face, many white hairs on the head, many cases of

premature nervous prostration all because we have foolishly worried over imaginary troubles as if they were real. Think of the loss of sleep and the needless anxiety all of us endure by " crossing the bridge before we get to it." In my boyhood I knew a woman—an otherwise good woman—who took all the joy out of her home by that sort of folly. Her husband claimed, jocularly of course, that before daylight on Monday morning she would begin to call her daughters: " Girls, girls, get up! Today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday, next day is Wednesday, washday; half the week gone and nothing done."

But another way in which we needlessly increase our troubles is by

MISINTERPRETING ACTUAL EXPERIENCES

We see ghosts at night when it is only a white horse (good old Dobbin, the family's best friend) walking down the road. We see ghosts. We know there are no ghosts, but most of us go on seeing them just the same. A blessing comes to us, and because we see only the surface we deplore it as a curse. When Jesus came walking on the waves to his storm-beleaguered disciples they could not believe it was their Lord bringing deliverance, but were frightened almost speechless because they thought he was a ghost. Many a time our Lord comes walking toward us with

blessings in his hand, and we cry out in terror thinking that what he brings in his hand is a curse.

When the disciples saw Jesus dying, the cross became to them the symbol of disappointment, chagrin, defeat. But before they died it was made plain to them that this Cross was an emblem of hopes fulfilled and victory achieved, and it has had this same joyous meaning to millions of their successors.

For thousands of years the Dead Sea has been despised and berated as the illustration of barrenness, desolation, and profitless stagnation, but just the other day modern science drew aside the curtain and revealed to us that the Dead Sea is the depository of immeasurable mineral wealth. Many a time in life we rejoice in our Sea of Galilee and bemoan our Dead Sea only to find in subsequent experience—"afterward"—that the Dead Sea has hidden beneath its forbidding exterior life's most valuable assets. If the brackish Dead Sea can at last come to us laden with wealth and blessing, why should we count a thing impossible Paul's assuring word, "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28), or his other promise, "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19), or any of the amazing promises of God? If the Dead Sea can yield a blessing any human experience

can. Since we understand that the Dead Sea is no longer a curse but a blessing, let us hope for similar discoveries as touching the bitterest experiences of our hearts. "Some time"—"Not now"—"Afterward"—"Then"—"What we shall be."

Again, we have all seen people who seem to be afflicted with what might be called

A TROUBLE COMPLEX

Into every present joy they weave the somber thread of a possible sorrow. They cannot enjoy a beautiful day because they have always heard that pretty days are "weather-breeders." If they are blessed with good health they cannot enjoy it because they have always noticed that "When you feel extra good it is a sure sign you are going to get sick." If in the providence of God they are blessed with life's temporal comforts, they cannot enjoy them for thinking morbidly of the multitude who cannot have such comforts. I have heard women warn young mothers against loving their children wholeheartedly and lavishly (as a mother should) lest God should be jealous and take the children away as a rebuke to idolatry. When I was a boy a young woman, the mother of a marvelously vigorous, healthy boy, used to come weeping to my mother, because she could not rid herself of the fear that she would never raise her

boy to be grown. Because of this ever-present obsession she could not really enjoy her fine, rollicking son. On last information the boy had become the father of a large and interesting group of boys and girls. The poor mother died prematurely. I do not know how the doctors diagnosed her case, but I suspect the true diagnosis was that she was shot through the heart with an imaginary arrow called, for want of a better name, a trouble complex.

Elijah once had a bad case of this trouble complex. He took all the joy out of conquest when immediately after a most brilliant victory over the prophets of Baal he cried: "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left: and they seek my life." At that very moment there were, we are told, at least seven thousand loyal Israelites ready to stand with him. And as for some one seeking his life, God had already given an order for the chariot in which he was to ride to heaven without dying. Jonah could not enjoy seeing a nation turn to God for grieving over the loss of prestige as a prophet. Some people are never happy except when they are miserable, so thoroughly are they dominated by the persistent and inescapable influence of the trouble complex.

But we needlessly increase our troubles by

CARRYING BURDENS THAT HELP NOBODY

A gentleman asked a pedestrian to ride in his wagon. The man got in gratefully but refused to take a heavy pack off his back, saying that it was enough for the good man to haul him without burdening the team with the extra weight of his pack. He could not be persuaded that carrying the pack on his back did not make it any lighter on the team. This folly manifests itself sometimes in the most sacred atmospheres. I knew a woman who conceived it to be her duty to visit daily her dead husband's grave. They told me that for twenty years she made this pilgrimage to the cemetery practically every day. Hot or cold, rain or shine, sick or well, whatever the inconvenience to herself or to others this imaginary duty had to be performed. Far be it from me to discredit the worthy quality of reverence for the memory of the dead or even reverence for the sacred spot where their bodies sleep. The desire to visit the last resting-place of our dead and to preserve and beautify it is a noble impulse. But to make a fetish of a grave condemns one to a life of legalism not only useless but hurtful. Many a time I have seen "two women grinding at a mill" when there was no corn in it. With amazing consecration and self-denial they are devoting themselves to

tasks that do nobody any good. Sacrificial devotion to a sentiment, to an ideal, indicates a noble heart. But for a man or a woman to burn out all the vitalities of life on the altar of an impossible ideal or an impracticable sentiment is foolish, not to say sinful. Why build holy fires when there is on the altar no lamb for the sacrifice?

In a lunatic asylum one of the inmates conceived the idea that it was his duty to wind up the world daily. Every morning he went to a certain wall, and turned an imaginary crank to wind up the world. If they let him perform his imaginary duty he was quiet and peaceable all day. But if for any reason he was not permitted to do it he was furious and unmanageable—quite sure that the world would run down and ruin everything before night. Now the world would have kept on revolving just the same without his daily assistance. But being a crazy man he did not think so. I would not discount loyalty to a conviction of duty, but I have seen some men outside of lunatic asylums who seemed to believe that the safety of the world depended on some little pet schemes of theirs, and who worried themselves sick because other people would not agree with them.

In ancient times they had a gentleman by the name of Atlas who carried the whole world on his shoulders. I know he did it because I used

to see his picture on the back of my geography. But if you answer me that Atlas is a myth, then I will answer you, that I have seen men in real life who, if they did not try to carry the world, did try to regulate the world and everything and everybody in it. And because they could not do it they made themselves and everybody around them unhappy. Maybe Browning was wrong when he had little Pippa sing, "God's in his heaven—All's right with the world!" But after long experience I have decided to try to do my bit faithfully, earnestly, diligently, unselfishly, altruistically in the fear of God and leave the rest to him, staking everything on his bewildering astounding promise in the eighth of Romans that all things work together for good to those who love him.

But we exaggerate our troubles by

REGARDING AS AN ENEMY THE SOUL'S BEST PHYSICIAN

Already I have referred to the blindness of the disciples in becoming alarmed because they took Jesus for a ghost when he came walking on the water to save them from the storm. May we think for a moment also of Jesus casting out devils in the "country of the Gergesenes." The two men were evidently rid of the devils that had blighted their lives, but because the transaction had cost the neighborhood a few hogs, be-

hold the whole city came out to meet Jesus and besought him to depart out of their coasts. Forgetting the devils he had cast out and remembering only the hogs they had lost, they regarded as an enemy their very best Friend and begged him to leave them. Many times we, in the same way, put a little loss over against a great gain and feel that God's providences are destructive of all we hold dear. The child in its superficial view hates the good doctor because the medicine is bitter, forgetting that the bitter medicine will cure the otherwise fatal disease.

In Edgar Lee Pell's book *Our Troublesome Religious Questions,* among many other fine things, is contained this story:

A great surgeon, a crusty old bachelor who had never known the meaning of love, became deeply attached to a little orphan child in a hospital. The little thing had had a hard life and had been so often deceived that she could hardly trust any one. But now her little heart went out to the great man. When he told her he would protect her and care for her she believed him. He found that a fearful operation would have to be performed without the use of an anesthetic. He put it off from day to day, trying to get some one else to take his place; but the other surgeons insisted that he was the only man who could undertake it with the slightest chance of success. And so at last he girded himself for the task. It nearly killed him, and it nearly killed the child. But what was worse, the pain he gave her destroyed her confidence in him, her only friend. He feared this and for days carefully kept out of her sight. Often he would sit just outside the door and listen and wait hoping that she would ask for him; but he waited in vain. At last the old man was so hungry

for a glimpse of her that he ventured into her room; but the child screamed out in terror and hid her face in her hands.

When I read this story I said: "Is not this picture of the surgeon cutting into the little child's flesh when he knew that she could not understand, a picture of God in his dealings with his children in what we call the mysterious dispensations of Providence? And is not the picture of this child screaming out in terror of the man whose heart is breaking because she mistakes his love for hate, a picture of God's children who cry out against his seeming cruelty at the very time that his heart is going out in greatest tenderness for them?"

IV

HOW TO DEAL WITH TROUBLE

My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord,
Nor faint when thou art reproved of him;
For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,
And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not? But if ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness. Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.

—Hebrews 12: 3-13.

HOW TO DEAL WITH TROUBLE

Trouble is everywhere present. Anybody who hopes to escape it has a painful disillusionment awaiting him. Since none can escape trouble it would seem that a man who presumes to write on that subject should try to make some suggestions about how to deal with trouble when it comes. In this chapter I shall modestly undertake that task. My first suggestion is

RESIST THE DOWNWARD PULL

Too many of us collapse when trouble comes—often cultivating as a virtue the fact that we have no more interest in life. Every man who has had a great sorrow has been conscious of this fatal undertow and knows from experience that the easiest road, the line of least resistance, the natural impulse, is to yield to it. In tenderest sympathy for every sufferer who has yielded to this impulse I feel moved to say very plainly that such a course is a sign of weakness and is to be deplored and resisted rather than coddled and encouraged. This course not only reveals a weakness of personal character, but it also shows a God-dishonoring weakness of grip upon and faith in his eternal promises. I have known men and women (particularly women)

who seemed to think they were doing God's service when after a bereavement or reverse they went moping with a so-called broken heart to the end of the journey. Such a course not only dishonors God but it puts an interrogation-point after one's profession of any sort of faith in God. Furthermore, it puts us exactly where the devil wants us. He could not be better pleased than to find that a hitherto buoyant Christian has allowed sorrow to make him listless and morbid. The author of Hebrews was inveighing against this tendency to just give up when he said, "Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet."

But a second thing to do in time of trouble is to

TAKE HEED THERETO

It is evident to any observing mind that many people, even God's children, suffer and are not benefited by it while others suffer and reap wonderful profit from it. Why this difference? In Hebrews 12:11, we read, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby." I think the last words of this verse furnish the key to this problem. If a man has trouble, and is not "exercised thereby," but whistles it down the wind as a thing to be ex-

pected, and says, "Oh well, it is a part of life—we all have our bad luck, and I guess I am having mine"—such a man will get no blessing out of his sorrow. But if when trouble comes, the man is exercised in mind because of it, and begins to say, "Now what does God mean to teach me or what blessing does he mean to bring me by this trouble?" and in earnest prayer seeks God's interpretation of it—such a man will find surprising spiritual blessing resulting from his trouble. There are two extremes here. One is the naive, almost superstitious habit of trying to connect every trouble directly and specifically with some sin that caused it, or some good that may flow from it. The other extreme is the habit of dismissing the subject from prayerful consideration and thinking of it as a mere matter of luck. The happy medium (where truth is usually found) is illustrated by the man who admits the insoluble mystery of suffering and yet in devout prayer and earnest consideration seeks God's interpretation of this particular trouble and his purpose in permitting it. To such a man, by methods he cannot explain, suffering becomes a benediction. In this matter there is a vast difference between the Stoic and the Christian.

The Stoic says: "Here is a piece of bad luck. It is a part of the lot of humanity. I will just grit my teeth and endure it, dismissing it from

my mind as soon as possible." The Christian says: "Here is one of God's providences—an event divinely ordained. Doubtless God is seeking to speak to me through it. I will draw near to him in this hour of darkness that I may hear what he has to say to my soul."

Here are four classes of human beings: The ox-nature that *cannot* feel sorrow; the Stoic who *will* not feel sorrow; the semi-savage who feels sorrow and rebels against God; the saint who feels sorrow and says, "All things work together for good," or "I glory in tribulation also," or "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." Of the four, the last attitude is the only right one and the only one in which any professed Christian ought to be found. So mote it be with me, and so mote it be with you, my beloved reader.

But another way to deal with trouble is to

CARRY ON IN SPITE OF IT

When the wife of the late Dr. J. B. Gambrell died, his friends knowing his chivalrous devotion to her and how almost like a child he, in so many things, depended upon her, feared that he would go utterly to pieces. The day she was buried one of his friends referred delicately to this danger, and the brave man said: "You need not be uneasy about me. I am going to do right." Though all of us knew he traveled a

desperately lonely road to the journey's end, the next day after she was buried he took the flag of service in his hand just as before, and nobody ever saw him falter and nobody ever heard him whimper. To have given up his work and drooped and moped would have been easier, but it would have made his sorrow harder to bear. If a man has sorrow let him bravely carry on. There is probably something in the idea that if he goes on with his work the very demands of it will crowd out thoughts of his sorrow, but that is not the chief thing. The main benefit arising from such a course is that the consciousness of doing a worth-while task will infuse into him a heroic spirit and a manly strength that will make it easier to bear his burden, and the fact that he goes on doing the work God assigns him will guarantee the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus, " I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you."

But another antidote to trouble is to

LOOK OUT MORE THAN IN

Introspection is a wholesome exercise and often brings great blessings, but the outward look is the characteristic attitude of the Christian. If a man is despondent, almost despairing because of his own troubles, let him take one good look at the troubles of those about him, and it will rebuke him and cause him to blush.

But let him go out and spend a day in the actual practical task of relieving the suffering of others, and he will come in at night with a song on his lips.

I was told the story of some pastor who said that one Sunday morning a youth came to his study before the eleven o'clock service and said: "Pastor, I am in great trouble. I have heard you say that it is an unspeakable tragedy to get into the church without any religion. That's my fix, and I want you to erase my name from the church book." The wise pastor said: "My son, I cannot erase your name from the church book. The church will have to do that. In the meantime would you do me a personal favor?" "Why, yes," the youth replied, "I would do anything for you—anything you would ask me to do." Then the pastor said: "You know old Brother Jones out here in the edge of the city. He has been unable to get to church for a long time. I wanted to go to see him this afternoon, but am afraid I shall not have time. I am wondering if you would not go out there and explain to him why I could not come; and if you will come by my house my wife will give you some flowers to take out to him." The boy's eyes brightened a little, and he said he would be glad to do it. But the pastor continued: "You are a good singer, and the old man is very fond of music; suppose you sing

a few songs for him. Could you do that?" The boy said he thought he could. Then the pastor said: "The old man's eyesight is so bad he can't read; suppose you ask him if he wants you to read to him a little out of the Bible. Do you think you could do that?" The boy looked an inch taller as he said he was quite sure he could. "Very well," said the pastor. "After you have read to him, ask the old man to lead in prayer, and when he finishes, if you feel like it you lead in prayer. Good-bye now, I must go to my pulpit." That night just before the evening service the young man broke into the pastor's study and without greetings said: "Pastor, you need not do any of that I was talking to you about this morning. I want my name to stay on the church book. I took the flowers to that old brother and explained to him why you could not come, and then I sang two or three songs and read him some chapters from the Bible. I did not know which ones to read but he told me. Then he prayed, and then I prayed—the first time I ever prayed where anybody could hear me. He got happy, and I got happy. I was miserable this morning, but I am happy now." If any child of God who reads these lines has a sorrow from any source let him take the outward look and render an altruistic service to a brother in need, and before he knows it his mourning will be turned into a song.

But to go a step further, if a man will deal wisely with his trouble let him make it a

SUBJECT OF PRAYER

We have a good example of it in Paul and his outstanding trouble, mentioned in the preceding chapter. We do not know what it was. He called it a "thorn in the flesh." It is better that we do not know. Doctor Scofield well says, "Paul's particular 'thorn' is not described that his consolations may avail for all to whom any thorn is given." He says concerning it (2 Cor. 12:7), "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." In the next verse he says, "For this thing I prayed the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." And in the next verse he says, "And he said, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." In other words, God answered his prayer by allowing him to keep his trouble and giving him strength to bear it triumphantly. Which, think you, was better? Here is a little boy staggering under a load too heavy for him. I could take his burden and carry it for him. But suppose I had power to infuse into his body such strength that he could easily carry it himself. Which would be better for the boy? In my personal experience, dear reader, I have found that usually when I have prayed

about any sorrow—with a humble, believing, submissive heart the Lord has either taken it away or has given me a strange new strength that I might be able to bear it more easily. But let us not think that to be eased of our burdens and entirely delivered from them are the only two ways by which God deals with us in the matter of sorrow.

REMEMBER THE TRIBULUM

Paul says, "We glory in tribulations also." Now our English word "tribulation" comes from a Latin word *tribulum* which was the name of a sort of comb they used to take the kinks and the knots and the tangle out of the threads of flax that they might be of some use. Sometimes God neither takes away our sorrow nor makes it easy for us to bear it but just lets it go on hurting like the tribulum tearing its way through the skein of flax because that is the only way he can make us of any account. No doubt if the flax threads had intelligence they would raise earnest protest against the painful and apparently destructive tearing of the tribulum. But with his superior intelligence the weaver knows there is no other way to get the best out of skeins of flax. Sorrows that to us are inexplicable tear and break heart-strings till we cry aloud in pain. But in the hour of reproof it is well if we

TAKE THE LONG VIEW

Look again at this passage in Hebrews, "No chastisement for the present seemeth joyous but grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." That "nevertheless *afterward*" has been of great help to me when I have had sorrow. The sorrow has been grievous beyond words. But the heart has been comforted by the thought that it cannot last always; that the road will be smoother just down the way, and that soon the rising sun will drive away the darkness. Every "present time" with its sorrow and darkness will surely be succeeded by an "afterward" with its joy and its light. I can endure any darkness just for tonight if I can be sure that the sun will shine again tomorrow.

But it is all the more heartening when I reflect that this Scripture seems to put sorrow and joy in the relation of cause and effect. Of chastisement it is definitely affirmed that "afterward it yieldeth [produceth] peaceable fruit." An old friend of mine used to say, "Sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better." Sometimes the very fact that things get worse prepares a soil out of which better things can grow. I have a friend, a noble layman whose life has been singularly packed with sorrow. One day he said to me, "Give me three years after any sorrow I have ever known, and I have been

able to see how it was a blessing in disguise." In illustration of this point take this leaf out of the pastoral experience of Bishop Slattery:

Let me give an illustration from experience which I know. A mother died, leaving a husband and a young son to mourn her. This father and this little boy became all in all to one another. The boy reached his twelfth year, and the father knew he must be sent away to school that he might have the training and the fellowship with other boys which the great school would give. So with a heavy heart the father sent the child away. No sooner had the sensitive boy reached the school than he began to write to his father and to his grandparents heart-breaking letters describing his homesickness, and pleading that his father come and take him home. The father longed to do so, for he wanted the child as much as the child wanted him. The grandparents were melted, and commanded the boy's father to go and bring him home. But the father stood firm, and the sensitive boy grew into a strong and useful man. The father did grieve that his boy was forced to live through the wretchedness and darkness of his homesickness, but being on a higher plane of life he saw beyond the present, and for the joy that was sent before the boy's life he was content to endure the pain in his own heart and (by sympathy) in the heart of his boy. He had longer views of life and its destiny so that the sorrow was each day turned into joy.

But as a final suggestion in how to deal with trouble, let me say,

CULTIVATE A CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

As concerning this idea some one invented the phrase "practising the presence of God." It is a

wholesome and much-needed spiritual exercise. Theoretically every Christian says with the Psalmist, "Thou art with me." But practically when we need him in hours of sorrow he often seems far from us. In times of darkness, distress, and danger man instinctively yearns for companionship. When Lindbergh made his flight across the Atlantic the thing that in the minds of the people emphasized what they called his "nerve" was the fact that he chose to make the mysterious, dangerous voyage alone. It was such an unusual choice that it seemed almost uncanny. Solitude in time of distress and sorrow is the refuge of the morbid. Under such conditions the normal man yearns for a companion. It has been so ever since Job lamented the absence of a "days-man" between himself and God. It will be so to the end of time.

This yearning of the heart for companionship in time of sorrow is illustrated by Pastor Truett out of his wide pastoral experience. He says a good woman in his congregation died leaving one child, a five-year-old son. The night after the funeral the father put the boy in the nursery bed as had been the custom and retired to his own bed in the adjoining room. In the night he heard the boy sobbing. When the father spoke to him the boy said, "Daddy, it's the darkest night I ever saw." The loving father, touched with the boy's grief, took him in his

own bed and pillowed his head on his own bosom. Gradually the boy ceased sobbing and stroking his father's face, said, "Daddy, it is not so dark now." The darkest night will be illuminated if in it we can only realize the presence of God.

At the risk of indelicacy may I put alongside this story one out of my own experience? Once, when I was pastor at Huntsville, Texas, I was walking with my son, four years old, to the station to meet a minister coming to help me in a revival meeting. The whistle had blown, and I was walking rapidly that I might meet my friend when he alighted from the train. Looking down, I became conscious for the first time that my little son was literally running by my side and was out of breath. I said, "Carroll, are you tired?" He said, "I don't tare if I do det tired thes so I am wiv you." I have never heard words that touched me more tenderly. He did not mind weariness if he could have the companionship of his father. That father knew he was not worthy of the confidence and exalted position the boy gave him, but he also knows by a half century of experience that there is One who is worthy and who is always present, and who will marvelously reenforce a drooping heart if we can train ourselves to realize definitely his gracious presence. Happy are we if our spiritual instincts are so keen that, realizing the presence

of God in our time of distress, we can say: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over; surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

V

THE COMING OF STEPHANAS

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ. But whether we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or whether we are comforted, it is for your comfort which worketh in us the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. And our hope for you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the suffering, so also ye are of the comfort.

—2 Corinthians 1: 3-7.

THE COMING OF STEPHANAS

In this concluding chapter may I say a word about the privilege and duty of helping one another in the time of sorrow. When Paul said, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ," he had in mind the inner sorrows of the heart, and especially the heartache that comes from a lapse in Christian character. How keenly solicitous the good man was for the man who bore the sorrow of being "overtaken in a fault"! All really good men are like that. How fortunate we are that God has made it possible for us really to help people who are in trouble. God comforts us in our sorrow that out of that experience we may be able to comfort others. Paul means exactly that when he says (2 Corinthians 1 : 3, 4), "Blessed be God, even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." What a tragedy that so many of us blunder along hindering and giving pain to our associates, whereas if we were a little more sensitive to our opportunities we could help them and make them glad!

Have you ever noticed that in many cases of extreme sorrow that which has helped us most has been apparently incidental, casual, almost accidental? An anonymous poem, a vagrant song, a word from a loving friend, utterly without premeditation, an old letter or some dormant memory suddenly vivified, unexpectedly brings light, where nothing but darkness had reigned.

Paul had spent three years preaching the gospel in Ephesus. His labors must have been successful for he left them with a well-organized church. But other fields clamor for his message, and he must turn away from those who had become so dear to him in the labor and sacrifice and triumph of the gospel in this idolatrous city. This prospect of separation saddened him. Every real pastor understands what I mean.

But he had another source of sorrow. He had just received a letter from Corinth—a church he had planted in his earlier ministry. The letter told him the sad news of unbecoming conditions and unseemly strife going on among the members there and of even gross immorality being practised by some of them. These two specific things, together with the burdens incident to "the care of all the churches," greatly depressed his courageous but very sensitive soul. At this time, and in this state of mind he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. The chivalrous gentleman never forgetting a kindness said in this letter:

"I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied, for they have refreshed my spirit."

In this experience Paul is not alone. What man among us has not had the same refreshing by the coming of some wise friend in an hour when we were sorely distressed. We talk about self-made men. There are no such men. All of us are in a very large measure what we are because at a crucial hour there came, in the providence of God, a Stephanas, a Fortunatus, or an Achaicus to refresh and hearten us just when the way seemed so dark that we dared not take another step.

I know how inadequate human sympathy seems in the time of a great sorrow. But I also know how barren life would be without it.

The path of history is shamed with defeated derelicts who would have arisen to triumphant living if some Stephanas had come along at the "psychological moment" to speak just one refreshing word.

Not long ago a preacher friend of mine—an old man—committed suicide. I learned afterward that the deed was committed when in despondency because he had come to old age in abject poverty and saw no way to live except to go to the county poor farm. What a tragedy that some well-to-do man did not play Stephanas

to my old friend and by relieving his necessities, not only make the old preacher happy but make himself happy as well.

A man came from a foreign country to Texas. After years of struggle to learn our language and make a living he was put in charge of a small post-office. Once the inspector found him a few hundred dollars short in his accounts. He was told that if he would make up the deficit within five days nothing would be said about it. On the morning of the fifth day he was found in his shabby room with a bullet hole through his heart—a pistol lying by his side. The day he was buried a good man said, "What a pity that poor old Mike should be driven to suicide for the want of a few hundred dollars, when if he had only let us know his necessities some of us could have let him have the money almost without inconvenience." All about us every day are men who make moral and financial shipwrecks of life for the need of a Stephanas intervening at the crucial moment. And all about us are men who once demoralized, discouraged, and defeated have been steadied, heartened, and made victorious by feeling at the most needy moment one magnetic touch of a friendly hand. Personally there are promontories "along the trail of the friendly years" made sacred by the fact that here some good friend—a veritable Stephanas—intervened to save me from myself. Will

my readers bear with me if somewhat in detail I go into some of these experiences?

I had been preaching a dozen years. My heart had grown sick in view of what seemed to me an utterly barren ministry. I was seriously debating the question of giving up the ministry and taking up the practise of law. About this time B. H. Carroll was moved—moved I doubt not by the Spirit of God—to preach a sermon to preachers from the text "I magnify mine office." I did not hear the sermon but, apparently by accident, had the chance to read it. He showed me that to be the right sort of preacher, though the very humblest, was the biggest thing in the world. He showed me that in this task to which God had put my hand he required faithfulness and not success. When I had thoroughly digested the sermon every impulse to go back to the law, my boyhood's first ambition, was gone. More than thirty years have passed, but not once has there been the shadow of a desire or inclination to give up preaching for any other calling under heaven. I have known many men to give up preaching and take up other callings. In most cases they made shipwrecks. An old man now, my soul sings with a joy unspeakable that God sent this message just when I needed it most to save me from wrecking the little boat on the rock of despondency.

But may I presume to give another very personal experience? It was thirty years ago; my friend Judge Fred W. Freeman and I had expended time and money and prayers and anxiety trying to save a brilliant friend from a drunkard's grave. It looked as if our efforts had failed, and I was so dazed by the failure that I was about to go into mental and spiritual panic. We were standing on a railroad track waiting for a midnight train to take Judge Freeman to his home. We were discussing the case of our friend. The train whistled. He placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "This is no time to go to pieces, we have done all we can for our unfortunate friend, now let us do what Paul said to the Ephesians, 'Having done all—stand!'" With this he swung onto the moving train and was gone. He doubtless does not remember the conversation, but his four-word message not only strengthened me for that trial but has helped me in a hundred battles since. Often when I have set my heart on a thing, a thing that I thought must be done and a thing which I had done my best to accomplish, and have been threatened with doubt and confusion when the whole thing went up in smoke, I have been steadied and fortified by the memory of that midnight message—"Having done all, stand!"

May I give still another case? The old-time Summer Bible School was in session at Waco.

We were running a "double header," one for the white preachers in Baylor University and one for the Negro preachers in the Negro College across town. I had just addressed the Negroes, and walking into Baylor Chapel, sat down by L. R. Scarborough, who had just finished an address to the white men. In my hand was my Bible in a leather case which a convict had made and given me when I was a prison chaplain. Doctor Scarborough looked at it and said, "Is that your medicine-case?" I said: "Yes, I'll give you a dose. I think John 3:16 is about what you need." He replied, "That is fine. Now let me give you a dose. I think you need Isaiah 30:15." But I said, "What is Isaiah 30:15?" With an unusual touch and tone-color in his voice, he quoted it: "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Just at that time we were in a liquor fight in my county, and I was into it up to my eyes. It seemed to me that every lying tongue in the county was busy framing and circulating slanders concerning me. Younger then than now, I was disturbed in spirit wondering what would become of me with all this talk in the air. Doubtless I had read the words in the Bible, but they had never impressed me. But now I could not get away from them. Over and over I found myself saying: "If you desire strength don't worry, don't fret, whatever happens don't allow yourself to

be agitated. Do right, trust God and entertain no forebodings for the future. . . In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength!" I cannot claim to have lived ever since on that ideal plane, but I do know that over all the intervening years this apparently accidental message has quieted my nerve and steadied my aim, whether petty squabbles or big battles were on.

May I give one more? I was pastor of a suburban church in Waco, Texas. The lamented T. J. Walne had been a luncheon guest in my home. After luncheon we went over to the little one-room frame building we used for a house of worship. We were standing in the pulpit. He was leaning on a crutch, for recently his right side had been paralyzed. I was saying: "Brother Walne, we need a new building. I don't see how we can go on without it. We are sending Sunday-school classes into private homes all over the neighborhood." The great old man hobbled a little nearer, and leaning with his left arm on my pulpit he said, "Did you say you *need* a new building?" I said, "We certainly do." His next question was, "Why don't you build it?" I replied, "We are not able to build it, the congregation is small and poor—most of them Baylor students and ministerial students at that." Placing his hand on my Bible which lay on the pulpit he said, "You know what this Book says, don't you?" When I suggested that he be a little more

specific he said, "This book says, 'But my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' You say you need a new building, and I think you are right. If this promise means anything it means that if you and your people will trust him and launch out, he will find a way for you to get the building." The next Sunday I preached on that text and launched a building enterprise. In an amazingly short time the auditorium in which that church now worships was built. In a few months the dear old man passed to his reward without knowing the vital part he had not only in building that house of worship but in shaping the spiritual quality of the best church I ever saw.

Thus have I, almost transcending the bounds of propriety pointed to a few out of the many cases where a passing Stephanas has refreshed me in a strategic moment. Now may I give a final illustration of the Stephanas idea?

Dr. F. W. Boreham gives us a chapter out of his own experience which illustrates how a man of meager gifts can help a more gifted brother. A parishioner of his had gone out in the morning cheery and buoyant to his work in the mines. Because of an explosion in the mines he was brought back that afternoon mangled almost beyond recognition. After months of suffering he was so far recovered that the bandages could be removed from his broken limbs. But it de-

veloped that his spine was so injured that he would never again be able to walk or even stand alone. Dependent on his daily earnings were a wife and seven children. It was his first experience with sickness, and his pastor wondered how the hitherto devout and cheerful Christian would meet this test of his faith.

When he was permitted to do so the pastor slipped in to have a word with his unfortunate parishioner. When after a few gentle words of comfort he was about to leave, the old man said feebly, "I want you to read to me the Ninety-seventh Psalm." The good preacher began to read. He read down to where it says: "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice. Clouds and darkness are round about him. Righteousness and judgment are the habitations of his throne."

Thinking that this was the verse that the old miner wanted to hear the pastor closed the book, but the crippled old man begged him to read on. He read on till he came to the words "Light is sown for the righteous." To the preacher's surprise the old man interrupted him with "That's it! that's it!" Then he went on to explain that while everything was dark now the light had not been lost, but that it had only been sown—planted, that it might bring forth a great harvest of light hereafter. He argued that when the farmer plants his seed he loses sight of it for a

little while, but the seed is not lost, for in due time it springs up and bears an abundant harvest. He went on to say that if you tell the farmer that he has lost his seed, he will laugh at you, because he knows that it will come back in greater abundance in God's good time; and he contended that while everything seemed very dark for the present moment, the light like the farmer's seed had been sown and would in God's own time all come back a hundredfold. I suspect none of the commentators will agree with the old miner's exegesis, but even if his truth cannot be properly deduced from this particular Scripture, he is on the right track if he holds that often in human experience the lights go out, and we are left in utter darkness as a preparation for a harvest of light.

It was after three days of blindness in the city of Damascus that Saul of Tarsus was qualified to see the "true light" which was destined to illuminate his path to the journey's end. Let us also notice that in this experience Saul had another "Stephanas" in the person of Ananias, who "putting his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost.'" This Ananias is never mentioned again in the Scripture record, but to have been God's "Stephanas" possessed of a divine alchemy that could remove the scales from

the eyes of such a man as Saul of Tarsus is glory enough for one lifetime.

Let me conclude this chapter with an exhortation that points in two directions.

In the first place, let us all keep open house for the coming of any one who may pass our way with a message of help. When you are in trouble wait expectantly for the coming of Stephanas.

In the second place, let us all be constantly on the alert for some sorrow-beleaguered soul to whom we may bring help. God help us to see the man at our door to whom in his sorrow we may become a helpful, refreshing Stephanas.

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